

September 29, 2014

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**A few words
from State
Superintendent
of Schools
Lillian M.
Lowery**

Our goal in Maryland is to produce students ready for college or career, and a new federal grant will allow us to provide special assistance to more than 1,400 students. Maryland last week received a six-year, \$13 million GEAR UP grant which will bring college within reach for a cohort of seventh grade students.

This grant—one of 10 awarded to states—marks Maryland's first GEAR UP grant since 2005, and begins with \$2.17 million for fiscal 2014. Maryland's project involves three systems: Baltimore City, Dorchester County, and Wicomico County. The grant will provide academic support and college awareness activities for economically disadvantaged middle and high school students.

GEAR UP provides a tremendous opportunity to support local efforts to improve college readiness and increase college attendance, particularly among low-income and first-generation students. We are excited about this work.

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There was more terrific grant news this month. Governor Martin O'Malley announced \$4.9 million in grants through the 2014 Digital Learning Innovation Fund and the Early College Innovation Fund.

This is the second year that the grants, which promote programs to prepare students to compete in the 21st century economy, have been awarded in Maryland. The Digital Learning Innovation Fund helps local school systems maximize the potential of new and emerging technologies to improve the teaching and learning environment, as well as to better prepare all students for the workforce of today and the future. Nine school systems were awarded the second round of Digital Learning Innovation

PROGRESS TAKES HOLD IN EDUCATOR EVALUATION

Representatives of Maryland public school systems are continuing to report progress in the statewide implementation process for new Teacher and Principal Evaluation, according to a new report.



CTAC's William Slotnik describes Maryland's TPE progress.

“Real Progress in Maryland: Student Learning Objectives and Teacher and Principal Evaluation,” issued today by the Community Training and Assistance Center and the Mid-Atlantic Comprehensive Center of WestEd, found growing support for the evaluation process. In particular, educators are embracing the use of Student

Learning Objectives (SLOs) as a tool to measure student growth and improve instruction.

“Maryland’s progress in developing an evaluation system is substantial,” said William J. Slotnik, founder and executive director of the Community Training and Assistance Center (CTAC). “The State is a national exemplar in this work, and is being transparent about the development process for effective evaluation of teachers and leaders.”

The report presented last week by Slotnik to the Maryland State Board of Education found that Teacher-Principal Evaluation (TPE) is prompting deeper analysis and use of data to focus on student needs. As educators gain more experience in the process, their confidence and skill levels in the process are growing.

“This is a State that understands what real progress means,” Slotnik told the Board, noting that MSDE continues to strengthen professional development and refine the system.

School system leaders credit the Maryland State

Fund grants, which totaled \$3.5 million, and will enable schools to utilize new and emerging technologies to strengthen student learning.

The Early College Innovation Fund supports efforts in Maryland to increase access to postsecondary education and help students obtain the credentials necessary to compete for jobs in growing sectors of the State's economy. This year, four school system-postsecondary education partnerships were awarded the second series of Early College Innovation Grants, which totaled \$1.4 million, and will help further develop partnerships between local school systems and higher education institutions and expand access to college.

Digital Learning Innovation Grants were awarded to the following school systems: Baltimore County (\$300,000), Carroll County (\$340,000), Frederick County (\$500,000), Garrett County (\$200,000), Harford County (\$510,000) Howard County (\$500,000), Prince George's County (\$350,000), Somerset County (\$400,000), and Wicomico County (\$400,000).

Early College Innovation Grants were awarded to the following partnerships: Hagerstown Community College partnering with Washington County Public Schools (\$196,976), Howard County Public Schools working with Howard Community College (\$248,016), Montgomery County Public Schools in partnership with Montgomery College (\$173,662.50), and Prince George's Community College (\$600,000).

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September has been "Attendance Awareness Month," but we should be paying attention to school attendance throughout the year. MSDE has partnered with the national Attendance Works organization to put a spotlight on chronic absenteeism.

Students can't succeed if they aren't in class. With the support of our local systems and the tools available through Attendance Works, we can strengthen student success and boost student graduation rates. Maryland attendance rates have improved, and we have more work to do.

Research shows that being chronically absent in the early grades affects whether a low-income child learns to read. By middle school, attendance is a key indicator of a student's potential to drop out. A study by the Baltimore Education Research Consortium shows that the majority of dropouts enter the 9th grade with a pattern of chronic absence that dates back several years. In Maryland last year, more than 80,000 students had 20 or more absences

Department of Education (MSDE) with effective help in implementing TPE.

"We are working closely with educators to construct a fair system that improves instruction and prepares students for college or career," said State Superintendent of Schools Lillian M. Lowery. "The more experience teachers and school leaders have with the new evaluation system, the more we will see professional growth and student achievement in our classrooms. This is a thoughtful, deliberate, and collaborative process."

The Mid-Atlantic Comprehensive Center, funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, partnered with MSDE to conduct the study. The study team included researchers from both CTAC and WestEd. The study is a continuation of earlier work by CTAC and WestEd and is designed to further strengthen Maryland's implementation of TPE and its SLO component. SLOs are measurable instructional goals established for a specific group of students over a set period of time. SLOs serve as one of the measures of student growth for the State Teacher Evaluation model

Researchers collected qualitative and quantitative data from State educators this past spring, including interviews with superintendents, teacher association leaders, administrators, and principals. In addition, focus groups of teachers were held and a Statewide survey of 16,316 educators from 23 local school systems took place with a response rate of 31.3 percent.

Among the other highlights of the report:

- Principals are more likely than teachers to agree about the positive aspects of TPE, although both are positive.
- Districts or schools that had prior experience with TPE, and approached piloting and field testing seriously, are implementing the process more effectively.
- Many educators believe that overall teacher ratings will not change significantly from the previous evaluation system. In districts that view the TPE process as part of the instructional system, teachers have fewer concerns about the ratings.
- Educators like the idea of using SLOs, a key factor in Maryland's education system, as a tool to measure student growth and prompt

both excused and unexcused. Research also indicates that kindergartners have similar rates of absenteeism as 9th graders. Attendance Works this month released a report detailing the correlation between attendance and achievement. It can be found at www.attendanceworks.org.

Attendance Works includes on its website a variety of tools that can be used to help strengthen attendance. Information can be found at <http://www.attendanceworks.org/what-works>

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Calendar

October 1-3 – Maryland Association of Boards of Education, Ocean City

October 10 – Teacher of the Year Gala, Baltimore

October 28 – Maryland State Board of Education meeting, Baltimore



VIDEO HIGHLIGHTS

Attendance Works

September 24, 2014

As the 2014-15 school year gets underway, Maryland joins a national campaign to combat truancy. Maryland Schools Superintendent Lillian Lowery talks about the campaign and Attendance Works.



VIDEO HIGHLIGHTS

Student Learning Objectives

September 17, 2014

Teachers, principals and superintendents gather in Annapolis for training involving Student Learning Objectives. In these professional development sessions, they learn the process of crafting student learning targets. SLO's, innovations fueled and funded by Maryland's Race to the Top grant, serve

collaboration. .

- Districts with substantive SLO training were more confident in all aspects of the process.

The report points out challenges remain in full implementation of TPE. Educators surveyed last spring indicated a need for additional training, which MSDE provided to more than 4,000 participants last summer.

The full report, *“Real Progress in Maryland: Student Learning Objectives and Teacher and Principal Evaluation,”* is available here.

MARYLAND'S RACE TO THE TOP CONTINUES

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) this month released a report on the return on investment from its federal Race to the Top grant. Maryland is recognized as a national leader in education, and continues to seek ways to do more for students and educators. The report, “Reaching World Class: Maryland’s Race to the Top Accomplishments” is intended to describe the foundation for student achievement growth that was constructed with grant support. It is posted to the MSDE home page and being shared with all stakeholders.



Reaching World Class:
Maryland's Race to the Top
Accomplishments

“It is with great pride that I share the Maryland State Department of Education’s report on the return on investment from the federal Race to the Top grant. No state has invested as much, or as wisely, in education as

Maryland, due in large part to our visionary Governor, Martin O’Malley, and General Assembly,” said State Superintendent of Schools Dr. Lillian M. Lowery. “We are preparing world class students to meet the needs of local employers and compete in a global economy. Maryland used the grant to make improvements that will enhance teaching and accelerate learning for generations.”

When President Barack Obama and U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced a new \$4.35

as a measure of student growth.



VIDEO HIGHLIGHTS

Board News

August 26, 2014

As the school year starts, Board News, August features a candid discussion of concussion - and what Maryland is doing to protect its athletes.

In the News

Maryland Posting "Real Progress" on Teacher and Principal Evaluation

WBAL-11

Hagerstown Community College Receives Early College Grant

Hagerstown Herald-Mail

New Effort Underway to Get More Students Eating Breakfast

Washington Post

Maryland's Race to the Top Progress – WBAL-TV reports on MSDE's new update report.

WBAL-11

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billion competitive grant program - Race to the Top (RTTT) - on July 24, 2009, Maryland chose to compete and win support for its plan to accelerate innovation and improvement in its schools. Today, the state can be proud of its schools, educators, and students for the achievements they made with support from Maryland's \$250 million RTTT grant.

Maryland committed to preparing world-class students with more rigorous standards, meaningful assessment, continuous support for educators, and began to turn around its lowest-achieving schools. Maryland continues to be a leader in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education, having been the first state in the nation to set specific STEM education standards that not only define what makes a STEM proficient student, but also help guide teachers' STEM instruction.

Maryland was awarded a Race to the Top grant on August 24, 2010, sparking some of the most creative education innovations in the State's history.

Twenty-two of Maryland's 24 school systems signed on to the ambitious program.

Among the projects highlighted in the new report:

- **Building Better Standards and Assessments**
 - Maryland adopted the Common Core State Standards and joined the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) consortium in 2010. The Common Core State Standards formed the foundation for Maryland's new State curriculum framework. Hundreds of classroom educators, instructional leaders, administrators, and higher education representatives continue to assist State officials in developing the new "Maryland College and Career-Ready Standards" framework to support implementation of these new standards. Schools across the state implemented Maryland's College and Career-Ready Standards in 2013-14 after three years of professional development involving more than 7,000 educators. New PARCC state assessments aligned to the more rigorous standards were piloted in nearly all Maryland schools last school year, and will be fully implemented in spring 2015.
- **Developing More Useful Data Systems**
 - Maryland is building a more comprehensive student data system, providing educators

with insight on student growth that can be put to immediate use in the classroom. Educators and parents can put the data to use through a series of dashboards, which chart trends in performance and progress. In addition, the State is developing a robust educator information system to track education, credentialing, and performance.

- **Improving Teachers and Leaders** - Maryland, working with a variety of education organizations, developed a new evaluation system to improve professional development and growth opportunities for both teachers and principals. The system takes measure of both professional practice and student achievement growth. In addition, Maryland launched the Governor's Promising Principal Pipeline and Leadership Initiative, which is helping to develop the next generation of school leaders through a year-long professional development program for promising principals.
- **Turning Around Low-Performing Schools** - Maryland has provided additional support and intervention in the performance of chronically low achieving schools. With Race to the Top support, Maryland also provided intensive technical assistance that has led to improvements in attendance and climate.

Many of the programs launched with RTTT funding continue throughout this school year, thanks to a no-cost extension provided by the U.S. Department of Education. Many of the initiatives supported by the grant will remain well after the federal funding is expended, having become part MSDE's infrastructure.

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